

USDA Announces Plan to Expand Genetic Testing for the Interstate Movement of Scrapie-Exposed Sheep

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has announced that it is expanding the use of genetic testing for determining which scrapie-exposed animals can move in interstate commerce.

Up to now, reclassifying exposed animals for movement based upon genotype has been limited to states that had signed pilot project agreements with APHIS. Now, all states will be able to use flock cleanup plans based on genetic testing.

The plans will allow owners to retain or sell exposed animals from infected or source flocks without restriction if they have met certain criteria and if genetic testing confirms that these animals are scrapie resistant. Genetic resistance is found by testing an animal's DNA to determine the amino acid that it codes at two specific locations, codon 136 and codon 171.

The plan calls for all sexually intact sheep not being moved directly to slaughter to be genotyped for scrapie resistance. Genetically susceptible exposed female animals and in rare cases, genetically less susceptible exposed female sheep will be removed under indemnity or permanently restricted to the premises. More specific information can be found at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahps/scrapie>.

All animals in the flock will be officially identified and entered in the scrapie national generic database. Animals that are retained will have their genotype confirmed and the genetically susceptible exposed animals and the genetically less susceptible exposed sheep must be identified with a microchip electronic identification device.

To comply with conditions of the genetics-based cleanup, a post exposure management and monitoring plan will be required.

The monitoring plan requires the following:

- Official identification of sexually intact animals that are sold or acquired;
- A record of any persons from whom sexually intact animals are acquired or to whom they are sold;
- Reporting of any deaths of mature animals and animals showing clinical signs and;
- Annual inspections.

All female genetically susceptible exposed animals, all those who test positive and the female offspring of positive animals must be removed from the flock. Flocks that remove all susceptible female animals will not be considered exposed flocks once they have completed the flock cleanup plan. Flocks not removing all susceptible female animals will still be considered exposed. Accordingly, until the monitoring plan is completed, these flocks will have restrictions placed on susceptible animals in the flock and such animals born or brought into the flock.

Note to stakeholders: Stakeholder announcements and other APHIS information are available on the Internet. Access the APHIS home page by pointing your Web browser to <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>. For additional information on this topic, contact Madelaine Fletcher at (301)734-6125 or madelaine.fletcher@aphis.usda.gov.

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